Strategy Research Project

CAN'T COUNT IT, CAN'T CHANGE IT: ASSESSING INFLUENCE OPERATIONS EFFECTIVENESS

BY

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USAWC CLASS OF 2011

This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)* 14-03-2011	**2. REPORT TYPE** Strategy Research Project	**3. DATES COVERED** *(From - To)*
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Can't Count It, Can't Change It: Assessing Influence Operations Effectiveness		**5a. CONTRACT NUMBER**
		5b. GRANT NUMBER
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S) Lieutenant Colonel Christopher R. Rate		**5d. PROJECT NUMBER**
		5e. TASK NUMBER
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Professor Dennis M. Murphy Center for Strategic Leadership		**8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER**
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013		**10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)**
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Distribution A: Unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
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15. SUBJECT TERMS
Measures of Effectiveness, Military Information Support Operations, Strategic Communications, Psychological Operations, Behavioral

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			**17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT**	**18. NUMBER OF PAGES**	**19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON**
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFED	**b. ABSTRACT** UNCLASSIFED	**c. THIS PAGE** UNCLASSIFED	UNLIMITED	30	**19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER** *(include area code)*

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Lieutenant Colonel Christopher R. Rate

TITLE: Can’t Count It, Can’t Change It: Assessing Influence Operations Effectiveness

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 14 March 2011 WORD COUNT: 6,119 PAGES: 30

KEY TERMS: Measures of Effectiveness, Military Information Support Operations, Strategic Communications, Psychological Operations, Behavioral Scientists

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

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CAN'T COUNT IT, CAN'T CHANGE IT:
ASSESSING INFLUENCE OPERATIONS EFFECTIVENESS

> For all persuasion artists who count with their hearts, souls, and guts, I only suggest counting like this: 1 = Yes the Other Guy Changed or 0 = No the Other Guy Did Not Change. And, if you cannot tell when, whether, or if the Other Guy changed, then persuasion is useless because persuasion is only about change.
>
> —Dr. Steve Booth-Butterfield[1]

The battle for "hearts and minds" wages throughout the global information environment. For example, the favorable attitudes of Afghans towards the United States and its forces are declining. Although the Taliban, along with al Qaeda, receive the majority of the blame for the persistent violence in Afghanistan, they continue to propagate their message that the United States is attacking the religious faith of the Afghan nation.[2] Their ability to garner support of the Afghan population and to promote hatred toward any United States effort in Afghanistan has proven a challenge for influence operations practitioners. Yet, practitioners have asserted that the United States is "able to reach the people through leaflets, food, broadcast coordination, use of coalition forces, and good deeds to prove [the United States is] not attacking their religious faith…[and these] efforts have paid off and proven to be an effective measure in…efforts against terrorism."[3] Where is the evidence that these efforts are effective? How can the practitioners "prove" it?

The effectiveness of strategic influence operations is often the subject of considerable debate, simultaneously coming under fire by skeptics of the general effectiveness of influence operations, and by those who would provide direction and resources for influence activities. Influence practitioners generally understand that assessing the effectiveness of influence operations is part of the "process," but they lack

the requisite capabilities to accomplish it. It is, therefore, an imperative to fill this void as the future of strategic influence operations is inescapably dependent upon practitioners' abilities to objectively demonstrate its utility and success in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of intended audiences. Unfortunately, as of today, most members of the influence community do not get it. While this paper does not assert the merits of strategic influence operations, it certainly attempts to mitigate the knowledge vacuum and draw attention to several factors essential to assuring the greatest probability of success in assessing its effectiveness. These factors include a comprehensive understanding of effectiveness measures, the inclusion of campaign evaluators at the beginning and throughout the planning process, and the development of a cadre of personnel with the knowledge, skills and abilities to conduct assessments. Strategic influence operations are about changing attitudes and ultimately behaviors…but, if you "can't count it, you can't change it." And, this applies not only to foreign audiences but equally to the perceptions of influence operations skeptics.

What Does It Mean to Influence?

In order to proceed with a discussion on strategic influence operations, it is important to establish a common framework from which to work. Lexical definitions generally agree that "to influence" is to sway somebody, or to have an effect on somebody that helps to determine that person's actions, behavior, or way of thinking.[4] Similarly, in a military context, as defined by the Air Force Doctrine Document 2-5,

> *Influence operations* [italics added] are focused on affecting the perceptions and behaviors of leaders, groups, or entire populations. Influence operations employ capabilities to affect behaviors, protect operations, communicate commander's intent, and project accurate information to achieve desired effects across the cognitive domain.[5]

Related to influence operations are the concepts of strategic communication (SC), psychological operations (PSYOP; now referred to as military information support operations (MISO)), and information operations (IO). Although their definitions are not entirely distinct (see Table 1), the concepts clearly overlap in their endeavor to affect the cognitive dimension of the information environment. Therefore, influence operations (IFO) will be used in a generic sense, when appropriate, to describe activities to influence the attitudes, opinions, and ultimately behaviors of targeted foreign audiences.

Term	Definition
Influence Operations	Influence operations are focused on affecting the perceptions and behaviors of leaders, groups, or entire populations. Influence operations employ capabilities to affect behaviors, protect operations, communicate commander's intent, and project accurate information to achieve desired effects across the cognitive domain.[6]
Information Operations	The integrated employment of the core capabilities of electronic warfare, computer network operations, psychological operations, military deception, and operations security, in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp adversarial human and automated decision-making, while protecting our own.[7]
Psychological Operations (PSYOP, aka Military Information Support Operations)	Planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. The purpose of PSYOP is to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behavior favorable to the originator's objectives.[8]
Strategic Communication	Focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.[9]

Table 1: U.S. Military Doctrinal Definitions—Influencing the Cognitive Dimension

In addition to strategic influence operations, it is important to understand the dimension of the information environment that is intended to be affected, that is, the *cognitive dimension*. The cognitive dimension—which, as it implies, exists in the human mind—includes the desired perceptions and attitudes of the intended populations of interest.[10] Humans process information they receive within this cognitive dimension. The information is filtered through an individual's unique experiences and biases (perceptions, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs) that act to provide a sense of meaning and context to the information.[11] Because words matter, establishing a common

vernacular is an important first step in understanding influence operations. In the end, however, the influence practitioner must understand the effect of influence operations on the cognitive dimension of the audience. Without this knowledge, it is impossible for the influence practitioner to champion, judge, or even defend the effectiveness of the influence activities. The ability of the practitioner to demonstrate the utility of influence operations is critical toward influencing the perceptions of a key audience; that is, influence operations skeptics.

Audience Analysis: The Skeptics

"We have met the enemy and he is us."[12] Fueled by an inability of the influence community at large to articulate the utility of their art, several key audiences have expressed strong skepticism of strategic influence operations. Representative of this accelerant, an influence operator confessed, "I have a huge problem explaining…what we do. For too long the 'lead-down-range' leaders have decided that since [they] don't understand IO, PSYOPs [sic], or any other non-kinetic capability, they will simply choose to ignore it."[13] The absence of or lack of immediacy of results often leads military commanders to question the value of influence operations.[14] It is often the fact that commanders are steeped in this culture of kinetic operations, but "the commander also needs to overcome the false need for instant gratification that is the expected norm for kinetic MOE."[15] Explicably, a significant contributor to this quandary is the lack of a complete story to tell by the influence community. "Doing stuff" doesn't sell well without the "so what." Quickly seizing this fact one skeptic caustically derided,

> Perhaps the greatest psychological operation (PSYOP) campaign is the one in which the PSYOP community has exalted the effectiveness of their trade as a combat multiplier and peacetime contributor in the pursuit of national and military objectives. Members of the PSYOP community oftentimes present a slightly one-sided portrayal of PSYOPS [sic] as "an

> extremely imaginative and versatile force multiplier" despite undisclosed shortcomings manifested in an inadequate system of assessment.[16]

In addition to the skepticism described above, there has been an emerging concern regarding influence operations at the highest levels of government. In July 2009, the late Congressman John Murtha, then chairman of the House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee cut out more than half of President Obama's fiscal year 2010 budget for military influence operations. According to the House Appropriations Committee report:

> [President Obama's] budget request includes nearly one billion dollars for Department of Defense information operations (IO) programs. The Committee has serious concerns about…the significant amount of funding being spent on these programs.... The Committee questions the effectiveness of much of the material being produced with this funding, the supposed efforts to minimize target audience knowledge of United States Governmental sponsorship of certain production materials, and the ability of the Department to *evaluate the impact of these programs* [emphasis added].[17]

From the perspective of Congress, the Department of Defense was spending vast amounts of money on influence operations. These activities tended to be conducted in secrecy and their effectiveness could not be measured.[18] Congress' ever-increasing frustration with the Defense Department's initial billion dollar request led appropriators to press the Defense Department on its influence operations requirements. When pushed, the Defense Department reduced its request to $626 million. Unsatisfied, Congressional defense appropriators then slashed another $100 million off the request. It was the opinion of the Congress that Department of Defense did not know what its influence operations "needs were, what they had, and what they should cost."[19] Now that Congressional oversight is tightening, Congress has directed the Department of Defense to consolidate its influence operations requirements in one

place. Under increasing scrutiny, future appropriations may certainly be tied to a demonstrated return on investment. In fact, an independent analysis of Defense influence operations activities has arrived at several similar conclusions, that: (a) Congress should tighten its oversight of influence operations; (b) the Department of Defense should conduct a full audit of its influence programs and projects; and (c) the Department of Defense should develop metrics to gauge the effectiveness of their influence programs.[20] Clearly, the ability of influence practitioners to articulate the utility of influence operations has fallen short of persuading the highest echelons of government of its effectiveness. Again, if you don't have a complete story, it becomes a moot story to tell.

In what appears to be an acknowledgement to the United States Congress that assessments of influence operations are lacking, President Obama reported that "it is important to the effectiveness of our programs that we develop the capacity to measure success and emphasize accountability."[21] If the skeptics have not made it plainly, if not painfully evident, the common denominator at the foundation of the criticisms and critiques is the absence of measures of effectiveness and deliberate campaign evaluation planning. These perceptions cannot easily be discounted. Perceptions are at the heart of the influence business, and therefore influence practitioners must not only influence their foreign target audiences, but they must also be able to influence the perceptions of their skeptics and resource providers. To accomplish this feat, the influence community must have an understanding of the complexities surrounding the assessment of influence operations. The bottom line is that if you "can't count it, you can't change it."

Towards an Understanding of MOE

Evaluation Types. Assessing the effectiveness of influence operations, “counting it,” is a challenging proposition. Influence operations are growing more sophisticated and strategic, and the evaluation component is not keeping pace with the innovation of influence practitioners. Further, there is typically a misperception of what information can be provided back to a campaign by the various types of evaluations during the campaign process. A description of the three major types of evaluations follows:

- Formative evaluation: The formative evaluation assesses the strengths and weaknesses of campaign products and strategies before or during the campaign’s execution; identifies beliefs, attitudes, behavior, etc. of target audiences; defines environmental conditions; establishes *baselines metrics*.[22]
- Process evaluation (Measures of performance): Measures of performance (MOP) are criteria used to assess friendly actions that are tied to measuring task accomplishment.[23] MOP assesses whether influence practitioners are “doing things right,” and how well the influence activities involved are working (e.g., distribution of materials, campaign reach, how many people reached, etc.).
- Outcome/impact evaluation (Measure of effectiveness): Measures of effectiveness (MOE) are criteria used to assess changes in system behavior, capability, or operational environment that is tied to measuring the attainment of an end state, achievement of an objective, or creation of an effect.[24] MOE assesses whether influence practitioners are “doing the right things,” and whether the influence activities involved are contributing to the attainment of

outcomes and objectives (e.g., changes in attitudes and behaviors) in the intended audiences.[25]

Subsequent to the establishment of baseline audience attitudinal and behavioral metrics, arguably the most important evaluation type is the outcome evaluation, that is, the MOE. Unfortunately, even with an unambiguous explanation of the measures, there is often confusion between the concepts. At times, MOP is misused to portray campaign effectiveness and the obtainment of objectives. For example, consider an influence campaign using the internet as the medium to deliver an influence message to a specific target audience to attain an attitudinal or behavioral objective. Influence practitioners may point to the number of "hits" on the website as a measure of campaign success. In fact, this is not a measure of effectiveness; rather, it is an MOP assessing that the campaign is reaching some audience (whether the specified target audience is being reached is a separate question). This example highlights how there was no linkage between the collection and a stated, measurable objective—what attitudes, opinions, behaviors were assessed that would determine if the campaign was having an effect. Some practitioners, desperate to present some level of campaign success, rely on such measures (MOP) that though important, do not capture the outcomes or effects (MOE) of the campaign, and are in no way meaningful from an impact or outcome point of view.[26] It is simply that without MOE, "some campaigns try to dazzle with a long list of process measures, or measures of their implementation and effort."[27] MOP will never suffice or replace MOE in determining the attainment of objectives.

Another source of confusion regarding what information can be derived from evaluation measures comes from the *Commander's Handbook for Strategic*

Communication and Communication Strategy, which makes the highly equivocal statement that future influence operations outcomes can be predicted based on assessment results.[28] This is a misuse of these evaluations, MOE and MOP, which are intentionally designed to be descriptive; that is, these measures inform the practitioner of "what is," not necessarily "what will be." An additional word of caution to influence practitioners regarding the misuse of evaluations is that MOE does not equate to influence operations success. Though MOE may show progress towards accomplishing an objective, it is quite possible to interpret MOE data that indicates the influence campaign is having no or detrimental effects. When this information is fed back into the campaign, the influence practitioner must decide whether to stay or adjust the course of the campaign, or cease activities altogether. Influence operations are inherently iterative and must remain flexible to respond to the changing information environment as indicated by the assessments results.

Attitudes versus Behaviors. B.H. Liddel Hart said, "to influence man's thought is far more important and more lasting in effect than to control their bodies or regulate their actions…."[29] During the development of MOE, influence practitioners will soon come to the realization that human behavior is complex, and that trying to influence human behavior is difficult. It is, however, myopic to focus only on influencing behavior. MOE is *not* all about behavior. Those who hold this view sell influence operations short of its full potential.[30] This naïve approach to MOE development could signal frustration for the influence arena as it ignores potential short-, intermediate-, and long-term effects that may suggest that the influence campaign is impacting the target audience towards a desired condition.

Most external influences (e.g., media) do not shape behavior directly, but affect change through processes in the cognitive domain of the information environment. Though one might agree that behavioral change is our ultimate goal, often it is not necessary or even plausible to measure behavior, especially if the behavior of interest is unobservable. According to Icek Ajzen, “we generally seem to behave in ways that are consistent with our attitudes.”[31] Therefore, attempting to influence a change in behavior without first influencing attitudes, values, or beliefs is not sustainable without the continual presence of the influence activity. Without attitudinal change, the audience will return to its original or previous behavior once the influence activity is terminated.

Causation—can it be proved? Adding to the complexity of assessment measures is the question of whether observed changes in attitudes and behavior can be directly attributed to any specific influence activity. Cause-effect questions continually arise during the evaluation of influence operations. Knowing the effects, if any, a program has is critical for assessing the program’s merits or worth.[32] Cause-effect assessments of human emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and behaviors of organizations, groups or individuals are simply no easy task, often requiring specialized education in this domain in addition to knowledge of research design and evaluation. Further, as a condition of the operational environment or an inability to collect sufficient data, determining causality may be unfeasible. This leaves the influence practitioner with only a confirmation that influence activities may somehow be associated to a change in audience attitudes or behaviors. Is this sufficient?[33] Assessments in general should not be approached in this manner. Determining the strength of association versus a cause-effect relationship between two variables—the influence activity and change in

attitude/behavior—is limited by data collection methods. Due to this, the influence practitioner should strive for the more rigorous approaches to assessing influence operations effectiveness. Through careful, deliberate planning of assessments and data collection methods, causal inferences can be made with increased confidence allowing practitioners to sell the "rest of the story" to the skeptics of influence operations.

As previously mentioned, one's ability to make causal inferences is a function of how one collects data. Causal inferences must be made through experimental (or quasi-experimental) means, accounting for unrelated variables which might confound the results, that is, factors that could suggest alternative, competing explanations for changes in attitudes and behaviors. Having gathered the data in this fashion, one should be more comfortable in making a causal inference. For example, individuals from the intended audience are first randomly assigned to either an influence or control group, and data is collected for both groups establishing a baseline. Following exposure to the influence activity, data is collected for the influence group. At the same time, data is again collected for the control group that was not exposed to the influence activity. Once the extraneous factors have been eliminated, accounted for, or controlled, then causal inferences may be drawn from the analysis of the data. But again, causality depends on the data collection methodology. Unfortunately, most designs employed in influence operations today are simply single group post-test observations or designs that measure a single group before and after it has received the stimulus. In each case, any attempt to infer causation is equivocal. Because there is no control (or comparison group) in addition to a host of possible factors that may have influenced changes in attitudes and behaviors between the pre- and post-test

observations, there is no way to account for alternative explanations for the assessment results.[34] It is important to reiterate that careful, deliberate assessment designs can be employed to better approximate the cause-effect relationship sought in influence operations.

Campaign Evaluation: A Mitigation Plan

As reminder, this paper is not arguing whether influence operations are effective, rather its focus is about bringing to light the challenges to influence operations from key skeptics; and, it attempts to clarify some misperceptions surrounding the assessment of influence operations effectiveness. As previously described, it is important to understand the perceptions of the skeptics and some critical misunderstandings surrounding the assessment of influence operations effectiveness. Armed with this knowledge, a mitigation plan can be designed to help influence practitioners articulate a full and accurate story of the utility of influence operations.

Inherently, most campaign models follow a logical process. The process models operate on what to do and in what sequence, allowing the influence practitioner some flexibility to be creative, but leaves ambiguity in how what they do is supposed to impact social behaviors. Practitioners are very adept at following their processes, but few have an adequate in-depth understanding of "why" they are doing certain steps or phases. There is an art and science to this process. The practitioners have the art, but there is a lack of science which could ultimately enable them to do their jobs more effectively. Influence operations is the confluence of art and science, it takes a richer understanding of the science to produce the better art, thereby creating a greater probability of developing an intervention that will in the end be effective.

Theoretical Underpinnings. In order to change behavior, influence practitioners should possess a rudimentary understanding of why people behave and think the way they do, while evaluators must possess an in-depth knowledge. Several theoretical models of human attitudinal and behavior change can provide this foundation, with one of the most prevalent and applicable to influence operations being the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). TPB is one of the most studied and applied psychological theories of motivation and behavior, being applied to myriad studies ranging from health behavior to business ethics.

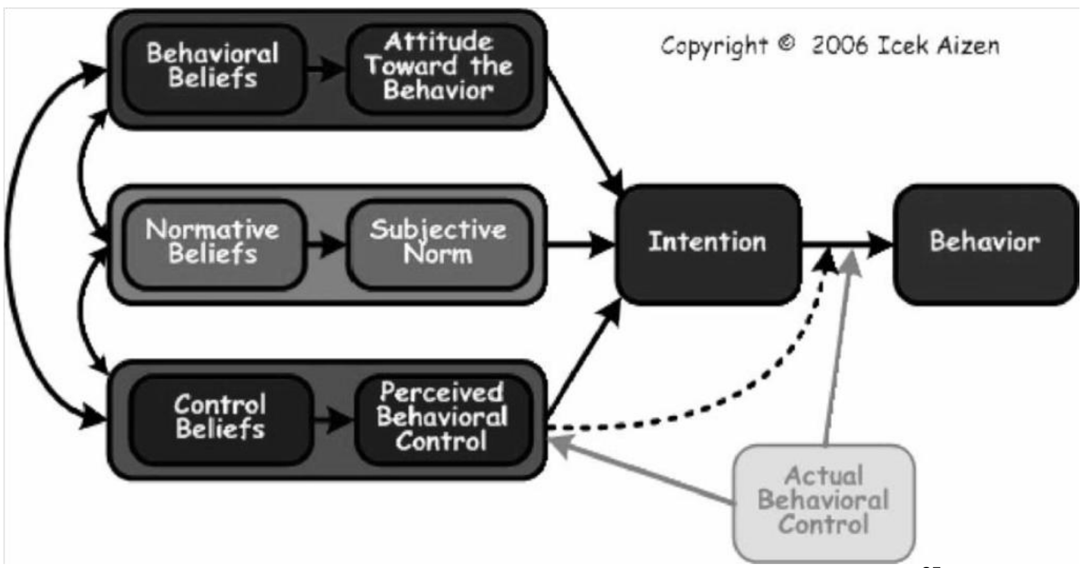

Figure 1: Icek Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior Model[35]

The model (as depicted in Figure 1) suggests that human behavior is primarily determined by the intention to perform a particular behavior. Working backwards, three major factors influence those behavioral intentions—an individual's attitudes toward the behavior, an individual's belief that others important to the individual have expectations of his or her performance of the behavior, and the individual's belief in his or her ability to perform the behavior. These factors are then influenced, respectively, by an

individual’s beliefs about the likely consequence of the behavior, an individual’s beliefs regarding social norms, and an individual’s beliefs about the presence of factors that may facilitate or impede performance of the behavior.[36] A strong comprehension of this model not only allows the influence practitioner to design influence activities to achieve desired effects across the cognitive domain, but also allows the development of short, intermediate, and long term MOE focused on changes in target audience attitudes, norms, perceptions, and behavioral intentions in order to ultimately influence changes in behavior. In reference to a similar model, Dr. Anthony Pratkanis stated, “I like this approach a lot because it forces one to think about each objective of the communication and whether or not that objective is important for the overall mission. It gets away from thinking of leaflets (or whatever) as magic bullets that magically get people to magically do stuff.”[37] To reiterate, “a deep understanding of the human behavior model…is critical to obtaining behavior change that is driven by perceptions and attitude, thus ensuring the desired information end-state.”[38]

Good Evaluation Starts at the Beginning. Currently, assessment of MOE is largely an ad hoc ability. Although the attention paid to MOE in the joint doctrine is negligible, some influence doctrine clearly is instructive that good campaign evaluation planning starts at the beginning of the influence operations planning process. From the beginning stages, “the social and behavioral sciences…provide insight as to what PSYOP soldiers should take into consideration when planning and conducting PSYOP.”[39] The challenge inherent within this statement is rather complex. Understanding the human condition and how to persuade or influence attitudes and behaviors through an appropriate medium is a daunting task even for even the most

experienced influence practitioner or social science influence expert. Effective employment of influence necessitates optimizing the art and science. Together, the practitioner and social science expert can bring multiple perspectives to bear with the goal of finding a common solution meeting the objectives of planned influence operations. The more we know and understand about the science, the better art we can produce. This deliberate blending introduces both challenges and opportunities for influence operations to showcase its utility.[40] To ensure a successful development of an evaluation plan, the desired effects and the assessment measures of influence operations must be determined during the formative stages of the planning process.[41] In other words, the MOE and MOP are crafted at this time to ensure that the chosen effects, objectives, or conditions are measureable. It is often the case that objectives are chosen that are beyond the scope of influence operations to effect or are simply not measureable as described by the desired effects (e.g., defining a desired effect as the absence of an attitude or behavior). If the chosen effect "can't be counted," then it "can't be changed," and therefore, it is not a valid MOE or MOP and must be reworked. This initial iterative process is essential to good campaign evaluation design.[42]

Just as science and art are integrated, the influence operations planning process must demand that influence practitioner and evaluator work hand-in-hand from the beginning of the process. This joint endeavor ensures that the overall objectives meet the commander's intent, while also ensuring that specific, measureable supporting objectives are developed to help shape assessment criteria. The influence evaluator consults with practitioners to develop well-defined supporting objectives that are quantifiable and lend themselves to gathering accurate and valid baseline data.

Formulating well-defined objectives is an iterative and collaborative process that sets the stage for all subsequent steps in the process of planning influence operations and campaign assessment.

A typical example of a comprehensive assessment program facilitated by influence evaluators generally follows a 5-step logic methodology to evaluate influence operations that includes: (1) defining objectives; (2) developing the research approach; (3) designing data collection instruments and plans, (4) implementing and validating the research strategy, and (5) evaluating the data and reporting the results.[43] Two conditions must be met in order to have confidence in the assessment program. First, the influence operations must have clearly stated, observable and measureable objectives. Second, there must be reasonable assurance that the intended target audience has received the stimulus being evaluated.[44]

During the evaluation planning process, which runs parallel to influence operations planning, the evaluator relies on an understanding of a theory of human behavior (e.g., Theory of Planned Behavior) to support the development of the main and secondary objectives. These objectives describe the desired conditions of target audience attitudes and behaviors. The evaluators use the objectives to drive assessment criteria while concurrently seeking input on the developing criteria from the influence practitioners, behavioral scientists, strategic intelligence analysts, and cultural advisors. The methods used to collect MOE are then internally and externally tested, as appropriate, before execution in the field. Evaluators ensure the methods used to collect the data give the campaign practitioners the optimal chance of making causal inferences if supported by the data analysis and interpretation. After ensuring

reasonable reliability and validity of the measures, the collection methods are executed by qualified personnel. Following data collection, the evaluator analyzes and interprets the data to determine if the progress is being made toward the attainment of the influence objectives, and whether causal inferences can be made linking the influence program to attitudinal and behavioral changes in the target audiences.

Influence and Assessment Specialists

Throughout this paper it has been noted that evaluating the effectiveness of influence operations is challenging and difficult. It is also commonly acknowledged that corresponding measurements are "costly in terms of time, money, and manpower and usually require special expertise."[45] To the latter point, a March 2010 report to Congress from the Department of Defense noted that most analysis of influence operations was conducted by defense contractors due to the lack of requisite skills within the Department. However, the government and military officials retained the responsibility for setting the objectives, targets, and policies.[46] Exploiting this apparent lack of capability, major defense contractors, as well as start-ups with little or no history or expertise in influence operations began casting themselves as influence specialists.[47] Further, Influence operations contracts were being won by contracting organizations whose ranks were filled with the same personnel who did not have the requisite evaluation and analysis skills while they were in uniform.[48]

In what can be interpreted as a veiled capitulation that assessments are too difficult, too challenging, too complex, joint doctrine warns commanders:

> When assessing operations, JFCs [joint force commanders] and staff's should avoid excessive analysis. Excessive time and energy spent developing elaborate assessment tools and graphs squanders resources better devoted to other elements of the operations process. Effective

> JFCs avoid overburdening subordinates and staffs with assessment and collection tasks beyond their capabilities.[49]

Although there are factions who would take this admonishment as an opportunity to relegate MOE to the shadows, others clearly envision this as an opportunity to develop a cadre of uniformed personnel capable of addressing the issue of measuring campaign effectiveness.

Most military members have only a minimal understanding of the human and cognitive dimensions of target audiences and even less understanding of how to assess changes in these dimensions. Beliefs that some influence practitioners tend to be more adept at understanding the nuances of segmented audience research and analysis is questionable[50]; however, in actuality, influence practitioners are ill-equipped for the task. The qualification training in influence operations prepares practitioners to follow a process but provides an inadequate understanding of the human condition and the complexities of campaign evaluation. "The fact remains that an intuitive understanding of or an advanced education in psychology, sociology, or cultural anthropology will not broadly occur among America's warfighting commanders."[51] Again, this highlights the importance of developing a skilled cadre—a cadre that can provide the expertise to assess influence operations effectiveness, provide influence practitioners the "rest of the story" to persuade skeptics of the utility of influence operations.

The Behavioral Scientist/Evaluator. The creation of a cadre with the ability to assess changes in the cognitive dimension of the information environment is necessary to fill the current void. In efforts to supplement the core of Army influence practitioners, the Air Force has recently begun to create what it also believes is a cadre of influence specialists. It has outlined the requirements for the award of a special experience

identifier to include the completion of two influence operations courses and an advanced degree in an academic discipline related to the execution and planning of influence operations.[52] In its desire to participate in influence operations, the Air Force is essentially duplicating an Army capability. The Air Force is simply increasing the pool of influence practitioners, not addressing the need for an *influence evaluation* cadre. The Air Force should be strongly encouraged to seize this opportunity to fill the specialized niche left void by the lack of uniformed influence evaluators, a function better enabling influence practitioners to conduct influence operations.

Ripe for development into the role of influence evaluator, the Air Force behavioral sciences career field conveys to influence operations a unique combination of social sciences expertise coupled with strong assessment skills. It is the critical, creative thinking processes, in-depth knowledge of the human dimension that are developed and engrained during the process of obtaining an advanced degree, along with the requisite assessment capabilities, that act as a niche force enabler to the existing influence practitioners, especially at the strategic level. Again, the goal should not be to duplicate, rather to enable influence practitioners to do their job better.

Arguably, the most significant contributions to the assessment of influence operations effectiveness have been made by a small cadre of uniform and civilian social and behavioral scientists at the Joint Military Information Support Command (JMISC), United States Special Operations Command, in Tampa, Florida. In 2007, the JMSIC created this element, which included seven doctorate-level scientists with varying backgrounds (e.g., social-cognitive psychology, clinical psychology, educational psychology, sociology, social work, etc.) at its full complement. Collectively, they study

all aspects of society--from past events and achievements to human behavior and relationships among groups—and investigate the decision processes and communication strategies within and between humans in a social system. They provide insights into the different ways individuals, groups, and institutions make decisions and affect relationships, exercise power, and respond to change. As influence operations enablers, the JMISC behavioral scientists are adept in the science of human influence and the methodologies to assess its change. This specialized cadre has developed a robust assessment capability that has been attempting to measure the effectiveness of influence operations where others have dared not even try. Since 2007, they have continually proven their skills, providing assessment assistance for influence operations throughout the Department of Defense and interagency. It is important to reemphasize that these assessment positions often require advanced, specialized academic education to provide effective support to influence operations. The advanced degrees not only bring an expert level of critical, strategic analysis, but also credibility while interacting with other Department of Defense components, the interagency, and academia.

Typically, JMISC behavioral scientists perform the role of consultant or adviser while ensuring the appropriate conduct, coordination, execution and integration of behavioral sciences into strategic influence operations research and application. The following section highlights the significant roles, primary and supporting, of the behavioral scientist as enablers within the influence operations process:

- Develops initial overarching objectives and assessment criteria.
- Advises on the selection of target audiences.

- Provides a comprehensive background in understanding human behavior, persuasion and influence, along with the processes that lead to constructive behavior change.
- Facilitates defining conditions, vulnerabilities, lines of persuasion and MOE.
- Provides supported theories of human behavior and analyzes relevant databases and psychosocial-cultural research.
- Provides audience segmentations according to similar patterns of attitudes, beliefs and opinions.
- Develops MOE and impact indicators used to evaluate progress of the campaign toward achieving its objectives.
- Develops baseline measures used to establish the current objective-related attitudes and/or behaviors of the target audience.

In addition to the roles delineated above, the behavioral scientist is the linchpin to executing influence activities and evaluation. The behavioral scientist formulates and implements an evaluation plan to assess the impact of influence activities over time. The evaluation plan involves collecting multiple data points to compare against baseline assessments. This process aids in monitoring potential changes in the intended audience—changes related to the objectives—subsequent to the implementation of influence activities. The behavioral scientist consults on the sequencing and timing of assessments and then analyzes and interprets the collected data. Most importantly, the MOE data collected over time is used as constructive feedback to provide rationale for necessary adjustments to the campaign based on its impact on the audience.

In summary, the JMISC model should be the standard by which influence practitioners will be able to influence intended audiences. At the same time practitioners will be equipped to answer the questions raised by influence skeptics. When senior leaders in the Defense Department and Congress understand and are persuaded by a complete narrative of influence utility, they will have the confidence to advocate for influence activities knowing that their guidance and resources are being translated into effective operations. By integrating the expertise and support of behavioral scientists into the influence operations process and daily operations of the JMISC, the command has demonstrated that an optimal blend of “science” and “art” increases the prospects for success in the arena of strategic influence operations. This is not a process of “art” then “science,” but a deliberate integration of the two throughout the entire process.

Conclusion

It is inevitable that in a time of shrinking Defense budgets, skeptics of influence operations will continue to doubt its effectiveness and make concerted attempts to acquire its resources. However, it will not be the result of the influence practitioner being unable to justify and defend his profession. If the influence practitioner and evaluator join their efforts and expertise at the beginning and throughout the influence operations process, a narrative of influence utility can be propagated throughout the Department of Defense to those who wish to communicate its success, and to those in Congress who desire to receive this information. The “hard work” in assessing influence operations effectiveness will come with educating practitioners on the nuances and complexities of MOE and its development, and mitigation efforts to ensure good evaluation starts at the beginning. The crucial component of all these recommendations

is the creation of a specialized cadre with the requisite skill to assess influence operations effectiveness. Taking steps now to build a integrated team of practitioners and evaluators will ensure that, in the end, influence operations will be an essential, critical, and credible part of any military operation, supported by the necessary expertise required to effectively achieve military objectives.[53] By demonstrating the ability to measure the effectiveness of influence operations, the community can persuade skeptics that, in fact, influence operations are changing the attitudes and behaviors of target audiences. Because, in the end…when we can count it, we can change it!

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